

Toward A Sustainable Future

Cambridge Growth Policy

UPDATE 2007

INSTITUTIONS





Following a lengthy planning and design process, the Main Library is being thoroughly renovated and will have a glassy new addition.

Institutions

As described in more detail in the 1993 growth policy document, Cambridge is distinguished by an extraordinary range of institutions for a city of its size. Clearly, Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are the most well-known institutional presences, and their campuses and land holdings tend to generate the most physical growth and change, and thus merit the most attention from the point of view of City policy.



The new Police Headquarters will be in a building near the corner of Sixth Street and Binney Street in East Cambridge.

The community's mid-size post-secondary schools, Lesley University and Cambridge College, also play important roles in the life of their neighborhoods. It is also worth noting that Cambridge's character is influenced significantly by the many other smaller institutions—such as the Episcopal Divinity School, three hospitals, a YMCA and a YWCA, many churches, and an array of smaller non-profits—that are scattered throughout the community.

Over the last decade, the City itself has made extensive improvements to its physical plant. These include a new waterworks in western Cambridge, renovations to fire stations and schools, a completely renovated City Hall Annex at 344 Broadway, a major expansion of the Main Library about to begin construction in Mid-Cambridge, a planned new police station headquarters in the eastern part of the city, and extensive and ongoing upgrading of its street system and related sewer and water distribution systems.

POLICY 49

The City and its major institutions should engage in a formally established ongoing dialogue to share concerns; identify problems, conflicts, and opportunities; and to fashion solutions and areas of cooperation to their mutual satisfaction. As part of this dialogue, each institution should create a plan describing its existing status as well as outlining its future needs and goals, and the means for achieving those goals.

POLICY 50

The City should recognize the need for the major institutions to adapt and respond to changing circumstances to maintain their leadership positions in education, health care, and research while recognizing, responding to and coordinating with City policy goals.



The North Yard project has been designed in close consultation with neighbors and the City. Ultimately, this formerly neglected area will feel more like the rest of the Harvard campus quad system, with green spaces and pedestrian ways framed by new buildings.

Community Interaction

Since the publication of *Toward a Sustainable Future*, each major educational institution has experienced significant growth on its campus. A great deal of attention has been paid to these changes in various public forums, as suggested in Policy 49. In December of 1991, the Mayor's Committee on University-Community Relationships called for the Planning Board, with the assistance of the Community Development Department, to conduct an annual review of institutional issues in the growth policy context, including "the status of known projects, time frames for the development of new policies, the identification of unmet community and university needs." Subsequently, the Planning Board and staff have developed an annual "Town-Gown" reporting process to elicit information that will be useful to the Board's work and of interest to the general public. Over the last few years, the Board, City staff, and the schools have worked to improve the reporting process, learning to "speak each other's language" and to provide timely information about changes that will significantly affect the broader community.

The Town-Gown reports are required to include information about existing conditions, a narrative of future plans (including, where appropriate, a 10-year time frame), a list of projects underway, maps of real estate and development, and transportation demand management data. In addition, there are institution-specific questions that the Board poses, based upon current planning and development issues relevant to each institution (see Policy 50). The Board also encourages the institutions to report informally on upcoming projects throughout the year, which is proving to be a good way to keep both the Board and the public abreast of issues as they arise, rather than waiting for the annual report, when decisions may have already been made.

Physical Expansion of the Major Institutions

The City does not have the authority to prohibit institutional uses in nonresidential districts, although there are regulations to protect against expansion into lower density residential neighborhoods. Nor was there any City review of the design of institutional buildings prior to the Citywide Rezoning process. However, with the advent of Article 19 project review in the Zoning Ordinance, the Planning Board now reviews the design aspects of new institutional buildings of 50,000 square feet or larger if they lie within 100 feet of a public right of way; if there are significant changes to parking, a traffic study is required.

Harvard University

The Citywide Growth Management Advisory Committee endorsed the concept of "transitional zoning" as a means of addressing the physical impacts of development in higher density districts abutting lower density residential areas. As Harvard realized that there would likely be considerable change near neighbors of the North Yard area (the part of the campus north and east of the Cambridge Common), a process was established for interactions among the university, the neighbors, and

City staff. An early part of that effort was the Hammond and Gorham Streets community process, which resulted in a rezoning establishing a new transitional overlay district along the edge of the North Yard. The Planning Board has granted Article 19 special permits for the Laboratory for Interface Science and Engineering (LISE) building on Oxford Street and the North Yard Sciences Building partially within the Hammond Street Overlay District, each of which had passed through the neighborhood committee process before coming to the Board. Extensive meetings attended by representatives of Harvard, the Agassiz and Neighborhood 9 Committees, and City staff members have helped to bring information to the Board about additional institutional growth issues for the Harvard North Yard area and the Harvard Law School. In late 2006, the Board issued special permits that allow the construction of a major new building for the Law School on Massachusetts Avenue.

In Mid-Cambridge, the lengthy community process for the Center for Government and International Studies (CGIS) facility at Harvard culminated with a special permit case under the provisions of Article 19. That facility is now occupied. In addition, the City's Riverside Neighborhood Study process brought forth a rezoning petition, and subsequently special permits were granted for housing on Harvard-owned sites in Riverside.

Given that the rest of the campus in Cambridge is nearly built out, Harvard acquired extensive land in Allston for future growth, and is undertaking a planning process to determine how to use that land. It is unclear what the effect of the new Allston campus will be on Cambridge, since Harvard's process is just beginning, and has yet to reach conclusions on issues regarding the schools that will be affected, transportation, timing, etc. The Planning Board has asked for ongoing reporting about the interaction of the new campus with the old, and generally about impacts of the new campus development on Cambridge. As a clearer picture emerges of how the university will grow in Allston, transportation impacts will be among the issues of particular concern.



View of Simmons Hall from Fort Washington.

POLICY 51

Where tax exempt academic uses are expanded into retail corridors and squares, mixed use development including taxable retail or other commercial development should be incorporated wherever possible, especially at street level, recognizing each retail area for its unique assets, opportunities and functions, and strengthening these aspects when expanding into such areas.

POLICY 52

The city's major educational institutions should be encouraged to provide housing for their respective faculties, students, and staff through additions to the city's inventory of housing units. Effective use of existing land holdings should be a tool in meeting this objective, where it does not result in excessive density in the core campus. In addition, where new housing is to be located within or abutting an existing neighborhood, it should match the scale, density, and character of the neighborhood. The institutions should be encouraged to retain this housing for client populations over an extended period of time. They should consider housing other city residents within these housing developments as a means of integrating the institutional community with city residents.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

A few years ago, there were extensive community reviews of the Simmons Hall dormitory and the graduate student dormitory on Pacific Street before those buildings were brought to the Planning Board for permitting. Citizens wanted to understand the impact of these projects that were to be built near the Cambridgeport neighborhood. Subsequently, the Zesiger Sports and Fitness Center, the Stata Center, and the Brain and Cognitive Sciences buildings went through project review at the Board, responding to the changing circumstances within their existing campus settings.

The Media Lab Extension project is another major project that has received its permits but has not yet finished its fund-raising phase. Finally, there has been planning for the east campus project, which is intended to incorporate facilities for the Sloan School of Management. This project was permitted in early 2007.

Lesley University

In addition to finalizing its master plan for infill and renovation of buildings on its well-established campus within the Agassiz neighborhood, Lesley University will incorporate facilities for the Art Institute of Boston, which is moving to Cambridge following a merger with Lesley. One step in that merger process was to rent dormitory space at the Episcopal Divinity School on Brattle Street at the edge of Harvard Square.

As Lesley moves forward with its master planning process, the Planning Board is interested in the relationship between the Porter Square portion of the campus and the Agassiz neighborhood campus. A specific issue is that the design of buildings along Massachusetts Avenue should address community concerns about maintaining an active retail environment.

Housing Issues for the Institutions

Over the past decade, housing for students and faculty has become a major focus for institutions, as expressed in Policy 52. In the 1993 growth policy document, rent control was still an issue. At the time rent control was ended, Harvard voluntarily helped the City create more than 100 permanently affordable units by selling buildings to the City at below-market prices. Currently, the City's affordable housing program is developing significant numbers of new units, some of which are in projects owned by institutions.

Following a planning effort for the Riverside neighborhood and a subsequent agreement between the City and Harvard, the university has received Planning Board approvals for graduate student/affiliate housing in the Grant/Cowperthwaite Street area and on the former Mahoney's nursery site. That agreement requires Harvard to convert the former Blackstone power station switch house on Blackstone Street into 33 units of affordable home-ownership housing for income-eligible Cambridge residents. The agreement also requires Harvard to provide a public park at the corner of Memorial Drive and Western Avenue. All of these projects are actively underway.

MIT has been developing dormitories to help solve the problem of housing its students in the very tight regional market. In part, the Institute is trying to reorganize its housing, by providing undergraduate dormitories instead of relying on fraternity houses, which have not succeeded in integrating the students positively into the life of the campus. In addition to the recently completed Simmons Hall and the graduate housing at Sidney and Pacific Streets, a new dormitory has recently been approved by the Planning Board for a site at Albany and Pacific Streets.

Preservation of the City's Tax Base

The 1993 growth policy document lays out the economic quandary posed by institutions in the city: while they stimulate the economy in many ways, they also place burdens on the City's finances (see Policies 53, 54, 55). Payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT) continue to be negotiated between the City and each major institution, taking into account the positive contributions made by the schools.

As forecast in the 1993 document, the educational institutions continue to play a very important role in employment in Cambridge. It is still true that 9 of the top 25 employers are institutions, although the rankings may not be exactly the same as in 1993; education alone provides about 35,000 jobs, or 35% of the total jobs available in Cambridge. Harvard and MIT together provided 17,308 of those jobs in 2005.

Commercial Investment

The University Park project, one of the most successful new commercial ventures in the city, was developed through the MIT Real Estate Office, with cooperation from the City and the designated developer, Forest City Enterprises. This success is now seen as a national model, with many communities visiting the project to learn about the agreements that made it possible, and to evaluate whether there are lessons they can take from the experience.

MIT acquired Technology Square as an investment property in the late 90s, and is working to add to the vitality of this project through the provision of more ground-floor retail space there. Given escalating market demand for premium commercial properties, MIT sold this asset in order to profit from the earlier investment. In addition, MIT is developing the former Polaroid properties along Main Street (known as the Osborne Triangle), with the rehab of an historic brick furniture building and a new research and development structure, now occupied by life sciences research companies.

A major economic impact comes from the spin-off effect of scientific research at the city's institutions; in particular the life sciences have spawned a biotech revolution, resulting in many jobs and an increased tax base. This phenomenon is discussed in the City document entitled *Cambridge/Biotech: History in the Making*. One of the most dramatic new developments is the establishment of the Broad Institute, which is an unprecedented joint venture of Harvard, MIT, and the Broad family to expand

POLICY 53

Except in circumstances where further institutional growth is appropriate or beneficial to the city as a whole (see Policy 7) the city's institutions should be discouraged from creating new fiscal burdens on the City treasury through the conversion of property from tax producing uses to nontaxable uses, and should mitigate any harmful effects of such conversions through financial compensation.

POLICY 54

The institutions' capacity for commercial investment should be directed in part to assist in the transformation of evolving industrial areas and commercial districts, as defined by City policy and elaborated upon through formally established, on going planning discussions.

POLICY 55

Where major institutions invest in commercial properties, their willingness to manage those properties partly in response to broader community objectives of diversity and community need, as articulated through the continuing formal dialogue with the City and its residents, should be encouraged, consistent with the institutions' fiduciary responsibilities.

POLICY 56

Recognizing the localized nature of their physical presence, the city's smaller institutions should be regulated on an individual basis as provided in the zoning ordinance's institutional regulations and as they are impacted by zoning, urban design, and other City policies.

upon the successes of the Whitehead Institute in genomic research. The building, next to Whitehead Institute, will also feature an interactive museum/education center to help make the complexities of biological research accessible to the general public.

Smaller Institutions

As noted earlier, the many smaller institutions found throughout the city help define its character and enrich its social life (see Policy 56). In addition to the three larger educational institutions, Cambridge College makes its home here. It provides evening adult degree education, and has become a national leader in such programming. While most of its facilities are spread widely throughout the region and nation, the College has established a presence on Prospect Street near Central Square, along with its Massachusetts Avenue location.



The Cambridge Center for Adult Education fits into its Harvard Square context, adding a learning component to the mix of retail and office uses.

The 1993 growth policy report describes in some detail the expansion process for Cambridge Hospital, which by now has settled into its new addition. At present, the focus is on Mt. Auburn Hospital, which plans to expand on its site between Memorial Drive and Mt. Auburn Street, by reconfiguring the main entry, building space for acute medical care use, and expanding its parking facilities. This project has received approvals from the Cambridge Historical Commission, since the hospital includes some older buildings on the National Register, and from the Planning Board under Article 19 for project review. It is under construction.



Mt. Auburn Hospital plans to upgrade its facility with some historical renovations, an improved entry, and more modern features throughout.



Cambridge College on Massachusetts Avenue, halfway between Harvard and Central Squares.

